

Plan and Purpose Bible Study #III-6 – Genesis 20-26

We are ready for Genesis 20 in our study. I am not sure whether this chapter is in chronological order or not. (Read) This gives us the picture of God's protective hand on Abraham. As we have mentioned before, Sarah was a very beautiful woman and I assume she held her beauty into her old age. At any rate, we have a similar circumstance to the situation Abraham and Sarah had with the Pharaoh in Egypt. Abimelech, king of Gerar did the same thing that the Pharaoh did in Egypt by taking Sarah into his harem. But before he came near her, God spoke to him in a dream explaining that she was the wife of Abraham. He also closed the wombs of the women in the house of Abimelech, so when Abimelech returned her to Abraham, Abraham prayed for him and his family that they could again have children. But again, Abraham came away from the incident considerably richer than he had been. Abimelech gave him sheep, cattle, servants and silver, plus Abraham was given his choice of living anywhere in the kingdom of Abimelech he wished to dwell.

Recall in Gen. 18 that three men had approached Abraham's tent and Abraham had invited them to stop for a meal. One of the men, whom Abraham called LORD, or Jehovah in verse 3, said to Abraham in verse 10, **"I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.** We're told that Sarah overheard this conversation and laughed, saying within herself, **"after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"** Sarah denied laughing when the LORD confronted her about it, but the LORD said, **"nay; but thou didst laugh."**

With this in mind read Gen. 21:1-8. There is record of other women older than Sarah bearing children and Abraham himself fathered children later. However, the key to understanding this is probably in Gen. 18:11 where we are told, **"it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women."** This truly made Isaac the son of promise, a miracle birth, likewise a type of Jesus Christ.

The fact that both Sarah and Abraham were old, as this verse also relates, explains how Abraham's brother's granddaughter, Rebekah, was old enough to marry Isaac later on, as we will see.

The name "Isaac" means "let him laugh" in the Hebrew. The fact that Sarah laughed when she heard the LORD tell Abraham that they would have a son obviously influenced this naming. As I mentioned in our last lesson, I believe this became a family characteristic in that in the world today, the people who laugh most and most easily are usually descendants of Isaac, more especially the descendants of Jacob-Israel. (Not the so-called Jews of today.)

(Read Gen. 21:9-21) The King James translation says that Ishmael was mocking Isaac. Though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of "The Book of Jasher", there are stories related in this book that, if true, help us to better understand what is often understated or unstated in the Bible. "The Book of Jasher" in relating this story says that Isaac was 5 years old, which would have made Ishmael 19 years old when this event happened. Instead of merely mocking Isaac,

we're told that Ishmael took his bow and attempted to shoot Isaac with an arrow when Sarah saw him. Ishmael was aware that Isaac would be the heir of Abraham's estate, which included the promises. This is brought to our attention in verse 10 where Sarah told Abraham that the son of the bondwoman **"shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."** Her solution was to cast out the bondwoman, Hagar, and her son. Abraham complied with her request and providing food and water for Hagar and Ishmael, sent them into the wilderness.

The apostle Paul uses this story as an allegory in Galatians 4 where he is explaining the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We won't go into an explanation of what Paul was teaching, but we need to remember this story so that when we do study Paul's writings, we will understand it better.

Reading this story of Hagar and Ishmael reaching the point that they thought they were going to die might lead us to think that Ishmael was a small child, but remember that, according to Gen. 17:25, Ishmael was 13 years old when God commanded Abraham to circumcise all of the males in his household, which was before Isaac was born. So the age of 19 as recorded in the "Book of Jasher" has some credibility. The point I think we should remember is in verse 18—God told Hagar that He would make Ishmael a great nation. We know today that the Arabic nations are descendents of Ishmael.

(Read Gen. 21:22-34) We have to remember that Abraham did not own any land at this point, even though God had promised that Abraham's seed would inherit all the land of Canaan. However, as it is today in our nation, particularly in the western states where water rights are very valuable and often contested, Abraham at least felt that he owned the water rights from the well that he dug by virtue of the fact that he dug it. When the Philistines stole it, the existence of the well came to the attention of King Abimelech. Abimelech came to Abraham, apologized, and then the two of them made a covenant granting the water rights to Abraham. As a token of the covenant, Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewe lambs. The name Beersheba, the name given to the place, means "Well of the Oath" or "Well of the Seven."

(Read Gen. 22:1-14) This story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac has several very important aspects. This story is usually portrayed as Isaac being a young boy. In reality, he was a grown man, some say 37 years old. So this adds another aspect to the story that is often not considered. Not only did Abraham offer his son, a type of God offering His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, but Isaac, like Christ was willing to be offered. Note in verse 2 that in the instructions that God gave to Abraham, He says **"thine only son, whom thou lovest."** This was not just a test of Abraham's faith, but a test of his love as well. Whom did he love the most, God, or his son? How do most of us stack up against this test of love? What, or whom, do we love the most? It was a test of Isaac's love as well. We find the same with Jesus Christ. In John 14:30, 31, Jesus is speaking to His disciples, **"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do."**

Also note that Abraham laid Isaac on the altar. Even though God provided a ram for the burnt offering, Isaac was first laid on the altar. By this act, Abraham dedicated Isaac, thus his seed, to the service of the Lord. As one reads the law and the prophets, the fact that the seed of Isaac, i.e. Israel was dedicated to God and was to be His servant, His witness, is quite evident.

We may not easily see the significance of all this. It was a test to see how strong Abraham's faith was but more importantly it provided a shadow of the offering of Jesus Christ as God's only son as a sacrifice for the redemption of Israel and the sins of mankind. If we can begin to understand the feelings and thoughts of Abraham on a human level as he prepared to offer Isaac, in whom the promises and the covenant was to be confirmed, we might have at least a little idea of the love of God toward us as He offered Christ as a sacrifice on a Godly level. Also Abraham gives us a good lesson here on the difference between "Believing God" and "Believing in God." It is one thing to believe in a God and quite another to believe Him enough to obey to the extreme without question.

There are many types and shadows in Scripture to help us understand God's Word better. We need to learn to recognize these as we come across them and use them to help us to that better understanding.

(Read Gen. 22:15-19) Upon seeing the obedience of Abraham, God re-affirmed many of the promises He had made to Abraham, including God's blessing, the great multiplication of his seed, the promise that Abraham's seed would possess the gates of his enemies, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in Abraham's seed. So far, we haven't discussed the promise that Abraham's seed would possess the gates of his enemies. I believe that it can be looked at two ways and both ways may very well be intended in this promise. Virtually all countries and cities have primary routes of access which, if controlled by someone else, would mean they would control that country or city. However, I believe that to understand the primary meaning of this promise, we need to understand what the gates of the city meant governmentally. The gates of the city were the equivalent of today's city hall or capitol building where the leaders of government met to make decisions and to render judgments. If someone else controlled the gate, it would mean that they ruled the city or country.

(Read Gen. 22:20-24) This gives us the genealogy of Rebekah whom we will meet in the next chapter and who was to become the wife of Isaac.

(Read Gen. 23: 1, 2) Sarah is the only woman listed in the Bible that has her age given at the time of her death. In this case, Sarah was 127 years old, so Isaac would be 37 at this time.

(Read Gen. 23:3-20) The purchase of the field in Machpelah, that contained the cave in which Abraham buried Sarah, was the only real estate owned by Abraham and his family until the children of Israel returned to the land of Canaan from Egypt some 400 years later. Later, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all buried in this cave, a site that remains sacred to this day and has not been vandalized.

(Read Gen. 24:1-9) As Isaac grew and matured, Abraham is adamant that he must not

marry anyone from the land of Canaan where they were living. Apparently because of his own age, Abraham chose his eldest servant for the job of finding a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's own family. We have already seen that Rebekah is a great niece of Abraham's, a second cousin of Isaac. There is concern among some that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others were violating the law by marrying next of kin since the law given to Moses prohibits it. In genetics, marrying next of kin would have been no problem at that time, but 400 years later when the gene pool had become greatly expanded and mixed, it then, as now, presents problems, thus the prohibition in the law.

(Read Gen. 24:10-28) Abraham's servant is surprised that God answered his prayer almost before he was through uttering the prayer. Rebekah was a very beautiful young woman. The servant of Abraham certainly recognized that all that was happening was according to God's plan and he blessed God for it.

(Read Gen. 24:29-60) This is pretty self explanatory. Everyone seemed to recognize that this was God's plan, so were willing to let Rebekah go and she too was willing. The blessing that Rebekah's family gave her in verse 60 is prophetic and certainly in conformity with the promises to Abraham.

(Read Gen. 24:61-67) The word "meditate" in verse 63 probably meant that Isaac had gone into the field to mourn the loss of his mother. Rebekah eased this mourning and comforted him once Isaac took her as his wife.

(Read Gen. 25:1-11) While it is difficult to remember genealogies, it is important that we remember where they are listed, as it is important, as we continue our study, to know where some of the people we will encounter came from. For example, the Queen of Sheba is recorded as coming to Solomon to learn of his wisdom. She would have been descended from Sheba who was a grandson of Abraham through his wife Keturah. We will also be dealing with the Midianites descended from Midian, a son of Abraham by Keturah.

We're told that Abraham died being 175 years old, however, keep in mind that Abraham lived until Esau and Jacob, sons of Isaac, were 15 years old. Abraham had lived in the land of Canaan 100 years, a period to which our Bible devotes 13 chapters. In this extremely condensed history, this much space devoted to the life of this one man indicates the importance that God places on what all happened with him.

As we have mentioned before, Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah with Sarah.

(Read Gen. 25:12-18) As God promised Abraham concerning Ishmael in Gen. 17:20, these are the twelve princes that Ishmael begat.

(Read Gen. 25:19-26) Isaac and Rebekah had been married 20 years before these two babies were born. Rebekah recognized that there was something different about her pregnancy that caused her concern. Her solution was to enquire of the LORD as to what the problem was. God's answer in verse 23 is important for us to remember. The twins that she

was to give birth to certainly were not identical twins. In fact they were about as different from each other as they could be. The people of one would be stronger than the people of the other and the elder would serve the younger. When they were born, the first born was Esau (hairy) who was red all over and very hairy. The second born was Jacob (supplanter or deceitful). While that which was evil and anti-God, and that which was righteous and pro-God, were certainly in the world before the birth of these twin boys, each of these forces became embodied in these two boys and their descendents. They will ultimately represent opposing religious systems, opposing economic systems, opposing world systems, one representing God's way and the other that which is anti-God, or man's way.

(Read Gen. 25:27-34) As the boys grew, Esau became a cunning hunter while Jacob became a "plain" man according to the King James Translation. The Hebrew word *tam* is the word translated "plain" here, but it is usually translated "perfect." Esau was Isaac's favorite and Jacob was Rebekah's favorite. The Book of Jasher adds considerable to the story of Esau selling the birthright to Jacob that is not in the Bible. Again, I am not vouching for the accuracy of the Book of Jasher, but it is interesting, and if true, would explain part of the reason that Esau was willing to sell his birthright. According to Jasher, the garment of animal skins, that God sewed together for Adam, had come to represent the right to rule by the one possessing it. At this time, Nimrod was in possession of it. A jealousy had developed between Esau and Nimrod and one day when Esau was out hunting he came across Nimrod with a couple of young men. He attacked them and killed all three men, but not before they had been able to call out to others for help who were hunting close by. Esau took the valuable garment that Nimrod possessed and fled. By the time he reached home, he was on the verge of total exhaustion. This is at least part of the reason given for selling the birthright to Jacob. Also, he had the valuable garment that apparently represented a more immediate valuable possession to him at the time than the birthright which promised future blessings.

At any rate, he sold the birthright to Jacob and with the birthright thus went the promised inheritance of Abraham. Jacob certainly took advantage of his brother, but I don't think we can consider Esau totally innocent either. We're told in verse 34 that once Esau sold the birthright, he despised it. A genuine hatred developed between the two brothers when Esau began to realize what he had lost in the birthright and the blessing.

Traditionally the birthright went to the first born son by right of birth. It consisted of a double portion of inheritance, i.e. if there were 3 sons for example, the father's estate would be divided into 4 parts. The one holding the birthright would be entitled to 2 parts and the other 2 brothers would each be entitled to 1 part each. However, the responsibility to be the family patriarch went with the double portion of inheritance as well. The birthright could be lost for cause and, as we saw in this case, it could be sold or traded. This trade between Esau and Jacob is the only case that I know of where it was actually traded but we will see instances of it being taken from the first born and given to another because of something the

firstborn did or didn't do. The importance of the birthright is not to be taken lightly. Understanding this importance will help in understanding some important principles of Scripture.

This might be a good time again to stress the importance of recognizing and understanding the sovereignty of God. With the birth of these twin sons of Jacob, we are beginning to see a plan emerge that we will be dealing with throughout the Bible. We will see that influences of both good and evil will be called upon in carrying out this plan that will ultimately all be good. (Read Isa. 45:7) This Scripture might help us understand this a little better. We should understand from our discussion about Adam's sin that this does not mean that God is evil or that He does something evil.

I believe there is also a spiritual birthright. In Gen. 1:28, we saw two mandates that God gave to Adam. **“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”** The fruitfulness mandate, **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:”** and the dominion mandate, **“And have dominion over....every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”** These two mandates were passed from father to son from Adam to Noah, to whom they were reiterated in Gen. 9:1, 2. While normally going to the oldest son, Noah appears to have given them to his youngest son, Shem, who then, because he lived much longer than his sons, their sons, etc., passed them to Isaac, who then gave them to Jacob, basically as part of the birthright that he bought from Esau. We'll see later that Jacob divided the two and gave the dominion mandate, or the sceptre, to his son Judah, and the fruitfulness mandate to Joseph. We'll discuss this more later, but it will be important in our study to keep this “birthright” in mind as we continue.

(Read Gen. 26:1-11) There was another famine in the land like the famine that forced Abraham to go down into Egypt. God appeared unto Isaac, and told him not to go into the land of Egypt, but rather to live in Gerar in the land of the Philistines. Abraham had also lived here for a time and because Sarah, his wife, was so beautiful, Abraham instructed her and all of his servants to say she was his sister for fear that the Philistines would kill him in order to take his wife. Sarah was Abraham's half-sister, but when Isaac resorted to the same trick for the same reason, Rebekah was a cousin, but not a sister. Abimelech, king of the Philistines, happened to catch Isaac sporting (*tsachag* –To laugh, mock, play with) with Rebekah and realized that she really was his wife and called Isaac to him and scolded him for lying about her, telling him that he could have caused great harm to the Philistines since he recognized that God was with Isaac. He gave orders to his people not to harm either Isaac or Rebekah in any way or they would be put to death.

(Read Gen. 26:12-16) Isaac prospered greatly while in the land of Gerar and reopened the wells that Abraham's servants had dug for Abraham while he sojourned there. Keep in mind that wealth was counted in possessions, not in gold and silver at that time. Abimelech finally came to Isaac and asked him to leave the area as he was becoming stronger than the people among whom he dwelled.

(Read Gen. 26:17-25) He apparently did not go far as we're told that he next sojourned in the valley of Gerar where he again ran into trouble with the Philistines over rights to water wells. Because they envied him, they plugged the wells that Abraham had dug. He then went up to what was called in Moses' time, Beersheba, where God appeared to him and re-affirmed some of the promises that He had made with Abraham. (Read Gen. 26:26-33) Abimelech again confronted Isaac, apparently because he was just hearing about the trouble Isaac was having among the inhabitants over the wells.

They agreed not to harm each other and sealed their agreement with a feast. That night, Isaac's servants came to him to inform him that they had struck water on the latest well that they had dug. Isaac named the well Shebah, around which the city of Beersheba (Lit.: Well of the Oath or Well of the Seven) was built.

(Read Gen. 26:34-35) Isaac and Rebekah had wanted both their sons to marry within their own family, but Esau rebelled and took two wives from among the Philistines. We'll see in our next lesson that Jacob obeyed his parents, but it was far from easy for him. JRL